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COLOMBIAN ARMY CHIEF ASSUMES PRESIDENCY

Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Commanding General of the Armed Forces, assumed the Presidency of Colombia at 10 p.m. on 13 June. Just as Rojas Pinilla was about to be fired by Laureano Gomez, who had suddenly come out of a twenty month retirement because of his health and reassumed the Presidency, the army carried out a bloodless coup.

The army coup breaks a long tradition of non-intervention by the Colombian military in politics. Rojas Pinilla had for some time been at odds with the Gomez clique over military policy and had been resisting its efforts to remove him. Meanwhile, fellow officers were urging Rojas Pinilla to take over and were making plans for the successful coup.

The new President appears to have the backing of the army, the police, and all elements of the Conservative Party save the die-hard clique of ousted President Gomez. In a radio address to the nation, Rojas Pinilla stated that the army would be in charge until a new government was organized. He promised that free elections would be held and that Colombia would maintain its international obligations.

He has appointed an all-Conservative cabinet of three military men and ten civilians, most of whom appear to be supporters of ex-President Ospina Perez, leader of the moderate faction of the Conservative Party.

The ousted Gomez clique, which was the dominant faction in the Colombian government up to the time of the coup, represented the extreme right wing of the Conservative Party and was hardly representative of the Colombian people.

Rojas Pinilla's assumption of the Presidency appears to make Colombia's prospects for settling its guerrilla problem, ending its state-of-siege, and returning to political normalcy brighter than at any time during the past three and one-half years.

Rojas Pinilla, formerly Colombia's representative on the Inter-American Defense Board in Washington, and most of the members of his new cabinet have well known pro-United States sympathies. This government can be expected to maintain the Colombian Battalion in Korea.

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